

BLUES BACK IN BUSINESS

SUPER Wycombe Wanderers recaptured their glory days of the early 70's when they convincingly defeated those renowned northern cup fighters Blyth Spartans in their F.A. Trophy second round replay at Loakes Park on Saturday.

A crowd of 2,400 — by far their largest of the season — cheered mighty Wanderers on to a comprehensive victory over a side who last year captured the imagination of the football public when they reached the last 16 of the F.A. Cup.

Blyth had no answer to Wycombe's superior technique, fitness, and above all commitment, which enabled the Blues to reach the third round of the top non-league competition for the first time since they first entered five years ago.

Wanderers went halfway towards winning this marathon cup-tie when they held the Northern League side to a draw up at Croft Park a fortnight ago. But they completed the job in such magnificent fashion that one long time Blyth supporter told me "I've never seen them so humiliated."

The match was by no means a classic on a sticky surface which tested the teams' stamina to the limit. Wycombe's recent indoor matches at Bisham Abbey undoubtedly gave them the edge, especially early on.

Kennedy unfit

Blues were forced to make a number of changes — positional and otherwise — when their captain Howard Kennedy injured his ankle in mid-week. Bobby Davies returned after injury to left back, Paul Birdseye returned to the right while the versatile Steve Hardwick moved into midfield.

This reshuffle could have unsettled the side but from

By MICHAEL KNOX: Wycombe 3, Blyth Spartans 0

the first whistle they took charge and after seven minutes received a tremendous boost with their first goal.

Hardwick, it was, who scored with a neat back header from Terry Scott's in-swinging corner to the near post. The ball went over the line before a Blyth defender cleared upfield. It is no coincidence that Blues corner kicks have improved since Scott took over from Steve Long on the right.

Blyth, clearly worried by the infamous sloping pitch, could string nothing together in the first half as their opponents' quick passing game exposed all sorts of frailties at the back. But for the sterling work of centre-half Tommy Dixon they could have been sunk without trace.

But there was nothing even he could do to stop Wycombe going further ahead in the 44th minute. Davies looped over a free-kick from the left and Stewart Atkins sent a brilliant glancing header into the far corner of the net from 15 yards.

Wycombe fans were jubilant but their joy turned to concern 60 seconds later when their hard working midfielder John Priestley lay writhing in agony in the middle of the pitch.

Reckless

He had been a victim of a reckless tackle by Blyth's former Sunderland star Ron Guthrie. The worry on Wycombe faces was evident as Priestley was stretched

off the field with a knee injury.

So during the half-time interval, another slight reshuffle was necessary with Mark Judd coming on as substitute.

The period after the interval would decide whether Wycombe would hold on to their precious lead. As expected Blyth launched an all-out attack, with overlapping full back Alan Walker looking particularly dangerous on the left.

He provided the cross from which Peter Davies headed just wide after 55 minutes, but for the most part the strong Wycombe defence, supplemented by help from all quarters, held on without undue alarm.

The worst moment for them came when Dave Var-

ty's clever overhead kick had John Maskell beaten. But to great general relief the ball struck the bar and went over.

Any fears of a Blyth recovery disappeared with that moment, but to make sure, Long headed home a third from close range after good work by Judd on the left 10 minutes from time.

Although a fiercely competitive cup-tie, it never boiled over thanks to the firm control of referee Mr Hamill, who took one name — that of Blyth's Walker in the second half for a tackle on Atkins.

WYCOMBE: J. Maskell; P. Birdseye, R. Davies, K. Mead, A. Phillips, S. Hardwick, S. Atkins, M. Holfield, S. Long, J. Priestley (sub M. Judd), T. Scott.

BLYTH: D. Clarke; J. Waterson, A. Walker, D. Varty, R. Guthrie (sub M. Dagless 61 mins), T. Dixon, P. Davies, K. Houghton, T. Johnson, S. Carney, M. Wall.

Referee: D. Hamill (Wolverhampton). **Half-time:** 2-0. **Scorers:** Wycombe — Hardwick (7 mins), Atkins (44), Long (80). **Attendance:** 2,400.

Wycombe injury crisis

THE injury to John Priestley which was diagnosed as damaged ligaments and will keep him out of football for possibly two weeks, has left Wycombe struggling to raise a side for tonight's Berks and Bucks Senior Cup semi-final against Slough Town at Loakes Park.

With Dave Allanson, needing a cartilage operation on his injured knee and Howard Kennedy out with a damaged ankle, Blues are virtually bereft of midfield players.

In addition Dylan Evans has not been training recently because of a sore back and to make matters worse Mark Judd yesterday started a two week suspension after being sent off in a Midland Combination game earlier in the season.

12 players

That leaves Blues with just 12 eligible players including two goalkeepers who may have trouble getting off work for the match.

Wycombe have appealed to the Berks and Bucks F.A. and have received permission to use two of their Youth team players on the substitutes bench for the Slough game.

Blues are being careful in their selection as several of their youth team players represent other local clubs who may be still involved in other county competitions.

This is a tough game for Wycombe who have already lost and drawn with Slough in their Isthmian League games this season. But when the teams met in the competition last year it was Blues who won with something to spare.

With their injury problems Wycombe will certainly have a big struggle tonight.

Yet another away draw

IF Wycombe go on to win the F.A. Trophy this season, they would have certainly done it the hard way for they have once again been drawn away should they reach the quarter-finals.

In a confused looking draw made yesterday morning the first tie out of the hat came out like this — Runcorn or Margate v Hayes, Consett, Accrington Stanley or Wycombe Wanderers.

Clarified

So should they get through their third round tie Blues have to travel again — their eighth away draw out of nine since they entered the competition five seasons ago.

The situation should be clarified a little this week. Consett and Accrington Stanley were due to play yesterday afternoon at the neutral North Shields ground, as the Consett pitch is still suffering from the vagaries of the wintry weather.

The winners of that match will then be away to Isthmian Leaguers Hayes, possibly later this week. The victors of that encounter will then entertain Wycombe in the third round.

The rest of the quarter-final draw: Kettering or Maidstone v Enfield, Enderby, Bishop Auckland, Crook or Kings Lynn v Stafford Rangers and Witton Albion or Dagenham v Yeovil.

For the record Margate drew 0-0 at Runcorn on Saturday and replay this week.

P.39 — View from the Wycombe terraces